

TRANSCRIPT— MARY ANNE KURFEES

ELIADA HOME INTERVIEW

Interviewee: Mary Anne Kurfees

Interviewer: Cliff Davids

Interview Date: November 10, 1999

Location: 1 Fieldcrest Circle, Asheville, N.C. (home of Mary Anne Kurfees)

Length: 1 audiocassette recording (side B only, 00:36:29)

Transcriber: Pat Fitzpatrick

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CLIFF DAVIDS: Okay. Today is November 10th, 1999. It's around 10:20 in the morning. It's a beautiful sunny fall, sort of warmish, day. And we're interviewing Mrs. Anne Kurfees.

Mrs. Kurfees, thank you for being here today. And if you're ready, we'll get started. Can you give me your full name, please?

MARY ANNE KURFEES: My name is Mary Anne Kurfees.

CD: Can you give me your date of birth, please?

MAK: 3/17/35.

CD: Can I have your current address?

MAK: My current address is 1 Fieldcrest Circle, Asheville, North Carolina 28806.

CD: And this interview is taking place at Mrs. Kurfees home. Ms. Kurfees, I understand that you arrived at Eliada when you were 12 years old. But can you tell me a little bit about your life before that?

MAK: My life before that, my mother and father lived in West Asheville. There was four children and my father was a plasterer. My mother, I don't know. She was a housewife. And we lived there on Montana Avenue for seven years. And then my father left with another lady, and my mother, she went to Washington, DC, and she did not return, so we stayed with my grandmother, which my father's mother.

CD: Can I interrupt you for a second and get some names, your mother and father's name?

MAK: My mother's name is Beatrice Carol Duckett. My father was Carl Duckett.

CD: Can you spell the last name, please?

MAK: D-u-c-k-e-t-t.

CD: And when your mother left to Washington, DC, and you stayed with your grandmother, what was her name?

MAK: My grandmother's name was Lizzie Duckett. And she was in her early eighties, I guess late seventies. And we lived with her for two years and my Uncle Richard came to visit. He was in service and he had spent his career there, so when he came home on furlough he saw the condition my grandmother was in, so he took us up to the poorhouse on the twelfth floor and we never returned back to my grandmother. We were put into the children's home on Merrimon Avenue--

CD: When you say we, could you tell me all--

MAK: We were my brother, my sister, and myself. My older sister was too--she was 12 years of age, so they did not take her into the orphanage so she stayed with my grandmother.

CD: What were your other siblings' names?

MAK: My brother's name was Bobby Duckett; my sister's name was Jean, and myself. My older sister was Gwendolyn Duckett. And she stayed with my grandmother till she finished high school. And then the children's home closed up. They were closing the orphanage up, so they placed us at Eliada.

CD: Approximately what year was that?

MAK: Probably about 191 or '42. And so we stayed there at Eliada until we graduated from high school. And then we went to--I went to my mother's in DC and worked for three months and came back to Asheville, because I did not like Washington, DC. And so I made my career after that here in Asheville.

CD: There you have it. So you spent a number of years at the children's home in West Asheville?

MAK: I was there approximately two years.

CD: Tell me about your experiences there.

MAK: I don't remember too much about the children's home. I do remember that we did go to church there at the Grace Church on Merrimon Avenue. I forget the name of it. But

anyway, we were--it was okay. There were like 16 children there, altogether. And then I had to have my tonsils taken out, so my sister Jean and Bobby went to Eliada a little bit before I did, because I had to have my tonsils out and then I went, returned there later.

CD: So approximately how old were you when you arrived at Eliada?

MAK: I was probably 11-1/2 because I went to the little girls' dorm when I went to Eliada.

CD: Little girls' dorm is the Allred Building?

MAK: What?

CD: The Allred Building, is that the one in the center[?]?

MAK: It was the first one as you go in.

CD: Okay. So what were your first memories of Eliada when you arrived there?

MAK: When I arrived there, the children were out playing softball. And I remember walking out to the field where they were. And, of course, not knowing any of the children, I was really--felt very--didn't know what to think, you know. But then my sister was already there. So she introduced me to the other children and then everything fell into place, you know, and I started making it home there.

CD: You stayed in the little girls' room--excuse me--little girls' dormitory. Did you have a roommate, or what were the--

MAK: They were like six girls to a bedroom. And they had separate rooms, but they were I guess six to a room. And I got there, it was in the early fall, and of course we had our

school in there at Eliada. We went to school there. We were not outside of Eliada at all.

We stayed there on the grounds there.

CD: What was the campus like? What did it look like?

MAK: Where we lived?

CD: Uh-huh.

MAK: Oh, it was nice. They kept it very clean. We had our chores to do and we, I remember our matron at the time was Miss Ford. She took care of us little girls and we would play games. And, of course, we had to do our [?], keep our rooms clean. But we had a lot of playtime. We had to do our homework every evening.

CD: Did the grounds right around the Allred Building have a lot of flowers or did they have any kind of plants there? Do you remember what it looked like?

MAK: I don't remember any flowers. I don't think they planted--they had a lot of trees that bloomed in the spring, you know, dogwoods. I don't remember any flowers.

CD: How did your life change most when you arrived at Eliada, once you had established yourself there?

MAK: Well, I just fell into the groove. You know, you had a lot of children to play with and this is very important when you are growing up because they taught us if you didn't get along, you were punished for it. So we got along great, because we had our little best friends, you know, that we liked better than other ones. So we all played together.

CD: You got there, oh, a couple of years before Dad Compton passed away.

MAK: Right.

CD: You arrived sometime in 1945.

MAK: Yes, I was in the old girls' building at that time and we were--I remember it very well. We were doing the, that was the month we had to do the washing. That was on a Saturday that he died, and we were down in the basement doing the wash. The 75 children, which was a lot of washing to do, but I remember that. Uh-huh. That was it.

CD: What was that day like after you found out that he had passed away?

MAK: Well, we were very sad. And the after he passed away, we went through a little--I think everyone was really upset. We didn't know which direction to go and this Miss Green had to take over and Miss Green had to get everybody organized so we wouldn't wander off into different playgrounds. And, you know, we had a little hard time there. But she straightened the orphanage out and had it going very well.

But I do remember they brought in--and I forget his name, that came in to take Dad Compton's place.

CD: Mr. Cameron?

MAK: No. It was--he didn't stay very long. I think he was from down Louisiana or somewhere down in there.

CD: This was a gentleman that came in for a couple years before Mr. Cameron?

MAK: Right. But Miss Green really did the--ran the orphanage after Dad Compton left. And she did a very good job. I mean, she had a big responsibility on her and she kept

everybody in line. I mean, you know, we had to stay in our own territory, you know. And that was good because, you know, you have boys and girls, if you can't meet some together when you're having, you know, have that many children, that was 75 children. So the little boys stayed in their dorm, the little girls stayed in their department. We stayed in ours. The older boys stayed in theirs.

So we changed jobs each month. One month I would take sharing the babies in the nursery, which was a very good experience for us. And then the next month we would--I would work in the kitchen and they taught us how to cook. We had to learn, you know, to do things like that. And then the next month you might do the laundry. All the older girls had to do the ironing on Wednesday. We came home from school. We had to do the ironing. And we'd get into little mischievous [laughing]. We'd do things that we shouldn't do, but we got punished for it.

CD: Well, now's the time to tell us, if you want to unburden yourself.

MAK: I didn't do anything that I regret. We were just, I know one time I put ...[?] in the fryer and tried to turn it on and it wouldn't go [laughing]. But we did little things to get attention, you know. That was our way of having a good time.

CD: Can you go back to when you first arrived there. When did you first meet Dad Compton, or see him? Do you remember that?

MAK: I don't remember that. I know he used to come down on Thursday evenings and have prayer meeting with us, in the big dining room. And we would always see him there when he was in town. You know, he went out to preach a lot, so when he was home we

would always have prayer meeting on Thursday night. And then we would have, he would preach on Sunday, and he would have lunch with us on Sunday.

CD: And did you see him with any frequency at any other time?

MAK: Not much. We were always in school, so we didn't see him. We saw Mama [?] more than we saw Dad.

CD: Do you recall what his help was like? Did it seem like he was a strong man at the time?

MAK: He was a nice-looking man. He was well built. Of course, Dad Compton was in his early seventies when I knew him. So, you know, he was getting up in age. But he was a nice fellow.

CD: Tell me a little bit about the schooling that y9ou had there.

MAK: When I started school there, we were having school in the older boys' dorm. This was down in the basement of the older boys' dorm. And I cannot recall who my teacher was. I only went to school there, I guess two years, because there were only two of us, Gwen[?] Warren and myself, that was in the same grade. So we went to Emma when we were in the eighth grade, which most of them started in the ninth grade. But we started in the eighth grade at Emma because there were just two of us. So I really went to Emma five years.

CD: Tell me about a typical day, a typical school day. Would you have to get up and do chores before you got the bus?

MAK: We did. We had to get up. We were always up, probably about 6 o'clock. I guess we were up earlier than that, because we had to get breakfast. We had to clean the dishes up. We had to do the chores before we went to school. And the school bus came around 8 o'clock and we would walk to the pillars where, past the dorm there, and get on the school bus.

CD: What is now Eliada Home Road?

MAK: Right. And we'd sit and put our makeup on behind the pillars. But he didn't let us wear makeup.

CD: Why not?

MAK: Well, back in the fifties, you know, people didn't wear that much makeup, and we felt that was--we wanted to be like the other children, so we wore makeup. We'd got away from the matrons.

CD: And, of course, you'd take it off before you got back.

MAK: We took it off when we came from school [laughing]. But, you know, it was nice. We enjoyed it. I didn't like Emma as well as I did Eliada going to school. Because we always felt like the other children, well, they didn't think we were as good as they were, being from the orphanage, but, really, going to my class reunions, I was really better off than they were. They were very poor children. And I didn't realize that. But we had very good food. I mean, we had good clothing. People would send in clothing to us. So we were well taken care of, but back then, you don't realize that, until you listen to the other children from the class. And I learned that going to the reunions. But we did, we had a

plenty. We had plenty to eat, we had good clothing. They would give out clothing around once a month that people would send in to us. We had plenty of clothes. And we worked and we played and we read the Bible a lot.

CD: Tell me about the religious upbringing that you had there.

MAK: It was very religious. We had devotions every morning before we went to school. Every Thursday night we had prayer meeting. Monday mornings we had to go to church, Sunday school and church. We had that. And then Sunday afternoon the older boys and the older girls, we had to meet in the library and listen to Billy Graham every Sunday afternoon. And so, you know, our time was filled up with--and then we'd do our homework at night, after we did our work, you know. But religion was very high, a big part of our lives.

CD: It doesn't sound like they gave you a lot of free time to sit around.

MAK: We did not have any--we only had like an hour's play a day. And that was if you had your work done. And I was very much into basketball and softball. I was the only girl from Eliada that got to play on the basketball team.

CD: I didn't know you were a basketball star.

MAK: I was. I got to play on the basketball team, and the reason Ms. Green let me play on the team was because my girlfriend came from a very religious family and they took me to the ball games. So that's why I got to play.

CD: Tell me about the friendships which they said have lasted all these years. I know there's a group of you that still stay in touch after all this time.

MAK: Well, we stay in touch with the ones that come in, you know, that do make an effort to come to Eliada to visit. And when they do get into Asheville, they'll call and we meet them. And it makes it--because these people feel like your brothers and sisters after a while, you know, you grew up with them, so I'm always glad when they do call and we get to see them.

CD: When you came home from school, you would have chores you would have to do. You had your schoolwork.

MAK: Oh, yes.

CD: Tell me a little bit about what that was like, later in your day. MAK: Well, when we'd get up in the morning, we would have to get ready for breakfast. If that was the month that I had to work in the kitchen, I spent that time putting food on the table. We would have breakfast. We had to clean up from breakfast, get ready for school, go to school. When we came home in the afternoon from school, we would--our chores, we already knew what we had to do. Thursdays was mending day. We had to darn the clothes, sew them up. Wednesday was wash day. I mean, Wednesday was the day we cleaned floors. We had to really get on our knees and scrub floors. We cleaned the floors. And then Thursday was--no, Wednesday was ironing day. Thursday was mending day. Saturday was cleaning day. Washing clothes. And usually we'd get through on Saturdays around lunchtime. And then in the afternoon we'd play baseball, basketball, whatever we wanted to play.

During the week at night, in the summertime, if you had your work done, say, by 7 o'clock, you could go out and play until dark. But during school time we had to spend an

hour or so with our homework after we did our work. So that was really the routine of our day.

CD: Did they keep a close eye on your grades?

MAK: They did. They really did. And some of the children did better than others, you know, which you're going to find that. And I think the ones that had the good grades were the ones that Ms. Green saw that they got more education after they got out of school. But, you know, a few of them did go to college. And a lot of us didn't.

CD: Tell me about Mrs.--Miss Green.

MAK: I always, Miss Green was a very nice lady. She was quiet but she knew exactly what was going on. If you were punished, she always saw to it that you did your work. I mean, she would come back checking it or have the matron check it. And she would take, I know Christine used to work up at Biltmore House after she graduated. She would load the car up with us kids and take us with her to take Christine back to the Biltmore House. We always thought that was a treat, you know, to get to go to the Biltmore House.

And one time she took Lila back to college and she took Catherine ...[?] and myself with her, to take Lila to St. Petersburg, Florida, to go back to school. And I remember she ran over a dog and we had to get out and walk, pick up the pieces to the radiator to the car and finally we got back home. But she did things like that with us. You know, she always made sure that if she went anywhere she would take a group with her, if she could possibly do that. And I always felt very close to Miss Green. I know when she'd go out at night, a lot of times I'd sit up in my window and wait for her to come home. That was

how much I cared for her. And I guess I was one that cared a little more, probably, than some of the others, but I think you pick a person that you want to be close to, maybe. Some of the other girls picked the matrons, but I always loved Miss Green.

CD: Tell me about Eliada during the holidays.

MAK: Oh, the holidays were wonderful. We had like at Christmas time, we would have a Christmas program. We had to work like a month before Christmas and get ready for the Christmas program. And some of the children had very good voices. They could sing very good. I was not one of them. But I always had a little part in the program. And they always had our Christmas program right before Christmas.

And at Halloween we bobbed apples. They had a big Halloween party for all of us together. And we got to dress up in Halloween costume. And it was just great.

And then in the summertime, right before school started, they would take us all to the recreation park. They would take a bus load, all of us children, and we would have a free day at recreation park. And that was given to us by the Elks Lodge.

CD: During Christmas time, would they ever take you into town as a special treat?

MAK: We did go to town. They would take us shopping and we would do our shopping one day. They would put us in one store, like in Woolworth's, where we'd get to buy little gifts that we'd, you know, if our parents sent us money or anything, we could spend our money. And it was just neat.

But, you know, other than that, we would go sometime to revivals and things like that. They'd load us up in the truck and take us. That was fun. We used to go on hayrides.

CD: Tell me about the tabernacle.

MAK: The tabernacle was very--we worked very hard getting ready for that, for the tabernacle. And people that came in, you know, we'd have to clean those door--well, they had a big building that some of us stayed in the building. We'd have to put up the beds in there and bring the mattresses in. And then we had to get ready, you know, fix the food, serve the food to them. It was just a very busy time and I know that they used to give us pennies, you know, change, the people that would come to the orphanage, and we'd get a Coke. They had a little store up there where the tabernacle was, and they sold cards and candies and drinks, things like that. And that was a treat for us because we never had those drinks during the year. We would always have it when they had tabernacle.

CD: Where was that building located, the one you just made reference to, the little store?

MAK: The little store was right down below Dad Compton's house. It was straight down. It was right there, right on, as you'd start down towards the tabernacle. It was a little store, it was like a little grocery store, but it was a lot smaller. It only had like Cokes and drinks, and they sold stamps and cards and things like that. So every day that we had camp meeting, they'd line us up and let us get something from the store. And that was fun.

CD: The part of the property where Humphries house currently is, what was standing there? Do you recall, when you were young?

MAK: That was where the pillars was. No, the pillar's right below there. That house was, that was where we had all of the little houses where the people stayed when they came to camp meeting. There were rows up through there. I guess there was like ten little--

CD: Were these right below Dr. Compton's cottage?

MAK: As you started past across Eliada Road, they started, right there. The little houses. Because all that was the tabernacle area.

CD: Are you talking about on the other side of Eliada Home Road?

MAK: Right.

CD: Where they had the cottages?

MAK: Right. That's where the little houses were. And only thing put in those were like two beds and--

CD: Like a little log cabin?

MAK: Right.

CD: Yeah, there's still one of those left.

MAK: I guess there were like ten of those. And then they had a big building there, right above where the tabernacle was, across the road from the little houses.

CD: Uh-huh. On that part of the road that sort of comes out like that? Where Mr. Humphries home currently is?

MAK: Right.

CD: What kind of shape was the tabernacle in when you were growing up?

MAK: Very good. We used to put a lot of hay there at the pulpit where Dad preached. Then they had the people--then they had the brick steps, you know, where people would bring their cushions and sit on the steps. And they would fill that tabernacle. And at the time, the tabernacle looked very large. Of course, when you're small, everything looks larger. But it was a big tabernacle.

CD: Why did they put the hay down by the pulpit?

MAK: For the people to kneel down. A lot of people went to the altar and people would always--he would put a big chair, a wicker chair there. People would drop their money into the chair, you know, on Sunday mornings or at night time.

CD: Did he use the tabernacle, other than for the camp meeting?

MAK: No. It was just camp meeting time. And he would use the tabernacle for that. Because it was open, see. It only had the roof and then the steps going up the different aisles. It was like on a football field, you know, except you just had the roof and then you had the little steps going up. And then people would sit on the--bring their cushion and sit on them.

CD: The tabernacle--so you never visited the tabernacle other than for camp meetings?

MAK: No.

CD: Never went up there and didn't have reason to go up there.

MAK: No. Unless we walked over the mountain. You know, we would go, a lot of times we'd walk on, they'd let us go up on the mountain and play, you know, we could go up there like on a Sunday afternoon.

CD: Where would you play on the mountain?

MAK: We would slide down the mountain.

CD: In the wintertime?

MAK: Winter and summer.

CD: Would you go up past the graveyard?

MAK: We would. We'd go up to the graveyard and a lot of times Miss Soyer[?] would walk us to Ben Lippen. You know, that's over the mountain, to Ben Lippen. We'd go over there and see a football game or something. Whatever they had going over there. And sometimes we'd go to the revivals over there, which, you know, the older boys went to Ben Lippen school. So they played on the team, so we'd sometimes go over there. And that's how I met my husband. I'd walk over the mountain. I'd see him. He went to Ben Lippen.

CD: What's your husband's name?

MAK: Fred.

CD: And you met him, do you recall precisely when?

MAK: What?

CD: Do you recall precisely when you met him the first time?

MAK: No. You know, you just see him at mealtime and that was the only time you'd see him, you know. I just know I looked out for Fred. He just had a good ()

CD: So you lived at Eliada until you were 18 years old.

MAK: Right.

CD: And then do you recall, in the years leading up to your departure, were you told you were leaving Eliada, or was it something that you hoped to put off?

MAK: I really never gave it a thought. I just, you know, I know when I finished school, my sister came down and got me and I hated to leave that place. I hated to leave Eliada. I went up and stayed three months and didn't like it. So I came back.

CD: So where did you stay?

MAK: I stayed at my aunt's house on Eliada Road. It was right below Eliada. And I could see Eliada from her house. I mean her apartment. In fact, Lila and I lived there for two or three years.

CD: This was after you officially left Eliada?

MAK: Right. And I went to work for Biltmore Manufacturing Company and worked on production. And that was a very good job. And my husband went into service. And when he came out, we got married.

CD: So you left 1950--

MAK: 2.

CD: 1952. And your husband served for--

MAK: Two years.

CD: --two years. And he left at the same time?

MAK: He left a year after I did. [Whispering] He got left back.

CD: [Laughing] Well, we'll let him explain that one to us.

Tell me a little bit about Asheville during the mid fifties.

MAK: I didn't know much about Asheville. We were very sheltered at Eliada. We did not get out much. The only time we went out of Eliada was to go once a year shopping and then we went to things that Miss Green would take us to, and go to the recreation park once a year.

We were really more, we stayed at Eliada, but I did get out. It was okay. I rode a bus to go to my job and came back. Of course, Asheville has changed since the 1950s a lot. And I know when my husband got out of service and we got married, I learned how to drive. And, you know, from then on it was just work, no play.

CD: Tell me a little bit about the types of jobs, or the job that you had since you left Eliada.

MAK: Okay. I worked at the Biltmore Manufacturing Company and they made Sears sportswear. And I worked there until my youngest child was in the--well, no, I left there when my second child was born. I never went back. And then I went to work at Enka

Manufacturing Company, Enka Corporation. And worked there, I worked shifts and then I quit there when my last child was like three years of age and I didn't work anymore until he started kindergarten, and then I went to school. I went and took a year's training in the unit part at the hospital.

So I worked in the hospital eight years after I had my children all in school. And then I left there and went to work for Dr. Philip Russell. I worked for him for 18 years. Then when he retired in 1991, I stayed home six months and then I went to work with Dr. Carl Chang and worked for him for four-and-a-half years. That was my career.

CD: What type of work did you do in the doctors' offices?

MAK: I was doctors assistant. I drew blood, I did EKGs, anything that had to be done.

CD: You mentioned that you had children.

MAK: I do have children.

CD: Can you give me their names and their dates of birth? I always like to test the moms on their memories.

MAK: Okay. My oldest son is 40 years of age. He's 41 now. And he works at--he worked for Rockwell International for many years. And then he went to Raytheon, which was in Madisonville, Kentucky. And he left there year ago and now he's working for a company in Kingsport. He is an engineer. He travels a lot and I don't know the name of the company he works for. I'm sorry I don't know that, but I have a card on it. I can get it for you.

CD: So he was born in 1959?

MAK: He was born in '57. And so he has a very good job. He has two children. Stephanie is 16, Brandon's 12. And he just sold his house this week in Madinsonville, so he's starting another house in between Kingsport and Johnson City.

CD: Is he building his house?

MAK: He is building it. Or having it built. And then my second child, she is Darlene Kurfees. Well, she's Darlene Davis now. She has always been--she went to college. All of them went to college. She works--she always worked in the bank business. She married J. W. Davis, which he has four banks of his own now around Asheville. Well, Hendersonville. He has a store in Columbia, South Carolina--Columbus, South Carolina. It's in Tryon, really. He has two in Hendersonville and he has one in Fletcher. So she's doing very well. They live in Flat Rock and she has no children.

And then my youngest son, he went to Appalachian. He has always been in retail. He worked for K Mart for a while and then he went with Lowe's. He was manager of Lowe's, one of their stores, in Columbia, Georgia. And he worked in Opelika, Alabama. He was going to be transferred way out to somewhere in Mississippi and he quit the job. He just did not want to travel that far. He has a little girl. He just could not do that. So he is now with (). He's in Atlanta, Georgia. He has his own store down there. Does very well. Has his own home.

But they've done well. They're hard workers. They've worked as we taught them how to work. I think it rubbed off on them. Really I do. I think if you're a good worker, they will be a good worker.

CD: Sounds like your children have done very, very well.

MAK: They have. We've been very proud of them.

CD: Well, if there's anything that you'd like to add, you know, experiences you had at Eliada, that you think it would be important for us to have obtained or if you have some last thoughts that you want to share with us about your time at Eliada, please feel free to do that.

MAK: I really liked Eliada. I enjoyed the girls. I do enjoy seeing them now when they come in. We had good times there. I have no regrets. In fact, I think that's where I learned to know myself, was when I was at Eliada, because we had so many opportunities to work and play, do the things that we should, you know, a normal child would do. And it was very interesting.

CD: Well, Ms. Kurfees, thank you very much for taking the time today to do your interview and unless you have anything further to say, we can stop right now.

END OF INTERVIEW.